

OPINION

suggested by assoc. prof. Nikolay Tsankov, PhD,

lecturer at the Faculty of Pedagogy, South-West University "Neofit Rilski" –
Blagoevgrad,

Included in the scientific jury for a contest for the academic position *associate professor* in the professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Theory of education and didactics), higher education area 1. Pedagogical Sciences, announced for the needs of "Konstantin Preslavski" University of Shumen in State Gazette, issue 97/10.12.2019.

The present opinion has been designed following the requirements for the Act for the development of academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for the development of the academic staff of "Konstantin Preslavski" University of Shumen in execution of Rector's order № ПД-16-007/03.02.2020.

Senior asst. prof. Natasha Lyubomirova Koleva participates as a sole candidate in the contest for the position of "associate professor", announced in State Gazette, issue 97/10.12.2019 and on the internet page of "Konstantin Preslavski" University of Shumen for the needs of the Department of Pedagogy and Management of Education at the Faculty of Pedagogy.

1. Overview of the candidate's academic career and research interests

Natasha Lyubomirova Koleva – candidate for the academic position *associate professor* is awarded her PhD degree within the Doctoral Programme "Theory of education and didactics" in 2016 after a successful defense of her doctoral thesis entitled "Team work in blended educational environment" (Diploma №Д-106/18.07.2016). The candidate's academic career in the field of higher education starts in 2006, when she was appointed adjunct instructor at the Faculty of Pedagogy of "Konstantin Preslavski" University of Shumen. She occupies the position of an assistant professor from 2009 to 2016, senior assistant professor (2016 – present), and in the period between 2014 and 2019 she is a lecturer in the pedagogical specialists qualification and training courses at the Department for information, qualification, and continuing education - Varna.

The research interests of the applicant during her career in the field of pedagogical sciences include: 1) Educational technologies; Information and communication technologies in education and in blended education; 3) Pedeutology; 4) Theories of education.

The research of Natasha Lyubomirova Koleva includes:

Monographs *(single author), one included as habilitation research	1
Books published on the basis of her doctoral thesis	1
Research papers published in journals, collections of articles, annual books, etc. (Научни публикации/статии в списания и публикации в сина abroad)орници, годишници и др. (вкл. в чужбина) (10 самостоятелни и 4 в съавторство)	14

The candidate has submitted a significant pool of evidence in support of her participation in research conferences, the design of courses; and syllabi; pedagogical specialists' trainings;

innovative education (individualization of student education through access to educational resources and interactive instruments for assessment, self-assessment of the results achieved in the virtual classroom), etc.

2. Evaluation of the research publications and the scientific and research activity of the candidate

The monograph, included as habilitation, "The Digital Competences of Bulgarian Teachers" (University Publishing House "Konstantin Preslavski", Shumen, 2019, ISBN 978-954-760418-6) with COBISS.BG-ID: 1292938724) represents research conducted on the "digital competence of Bulgarian teachers" and its main purpose is to clarify the essence of the concept of "digital competence", the mechanisms and instruments for determining its level, as well as to establish the current state of digital competence of Bulgarian teachers pedagogical specialists. The large study contingent ensures a certain degree of plausibility of the results. However, is pre-eminently conclusive (well thought out, conceptually justified and implemented according to all research rules), which is the basis for the recommendation to the research program: to be extended, on the basis of which to develop and approve technological options for developing the digital competence of pedagogical specialists. The detailed review of the DigCompEdu European Framework for the Digital Competence of Pedagogical Specialists is a reason to look for opportunities to evaluate its applicability in the context of Bulgarian education. Based on a study of the digital competences of over 260 Bulgarian pedagogical specialists, and considering its components defined in the European framework, an attempt is made to typify teachers according to their digital competences, which may be a further guideline for improving their professional qualification in this field. The book published on the basis of a dissertation thesis for the doctorate degree, *Blended education in universities* (Konstantin Preslavski University Publishing House, Shumen, 2019, ISBN 978-619-201-289-2), COBISS.BG-ID: 1292888804, is a monograph and presents a study aimed at developing and establishing the practical applicability of a student learning model through teamwork conducted in a blended learning environment. The concepts of "blended learning" and "co-learning" have been clarified and enriched by outlining their parameters in the different modes of use in the educational sciences. Modern educational methods and technologies for team and blended learning activities have been systematized. The empirical research is aimed at exploring students' attitudes towards electronic and mixed form of the learning process, using the analysis of results as a basis to design the components of a model for teamwork. The proposed model has been tested and its effectiveness evaluated. The texts require more criticality in the interpretation of the author's opinions, given the fact that enough grounds have been found and derived in many places and more correctness in the use of basic science education concepts, especially when attempting to use concepts specific to school didactics and their introduction in the context of higher education didactics.

The articles - 14 in number, 4 of which are co-authored (all except for those submitted for the acquisition of the Doctoral degree), are all in the area of educational technologies, which is the research area suited to the announced academic position of associate professor. Research and scientific inquiries are related to the study of the digital competence of pedagogical specialists; teams and teamwork; collaborative learning; blended learning; training in digital and virtual environments; aspects of the application of information and communication technologies in school and university education; physical education and healthy lifestyles, etc.

The following suggested texts for review in monographic studies and articles have been submitted: (1) a systematic review of European policies for the digital transformation of education (a promising area of research for education sciences and didactics in particular); (2) the European countries' experience in developing and developing digital competences has been followed; (3) the need and opportunities for the development of the digital competence of pedagogical specialists as a basis for the occurrence of the digital transformation have been highlighted. The empirical research related to the introduction of the Computer Modeling discipline in the initial stage (160 teachers is a contingent of research) is deepened, which is based on the self-assessment and assessment of teachers' readiness for training in the new elementary school.

Some publications focus on a very topical topic, namely blended learning, systematizing the advantages and disadvantages of university education and its application in different contexts by using different technological solutions, such as the use of virtual classrooms. A valid and effective model for the application of blended learning in university education is proposed.

The candidate for the academic position of Associate Professor, Assistant Professor Natasha Lyubomirova Koleva, participates in a number of international and national projects related to: (1) the upbringing, socialization, training, classroom management in different educational levels and stages of school education; (2) the practical training of students in university education; (3) innovative educational technologies; (4) qualifications of pedagogical specialists, etc.

Quotations provided (6 in number) specifically related to research, cover the required minimum for group D indicators. However, having in mind the huge research interest in the thematic field, they are not enough and require that in future the publication activity of the applicant should increase.

The academic workload of Natasha Koleva PhD covers the following courses: Information and communication technologies in education and work in digital environment, Audio-visual and information technologies in education, Pedagogical diagnostics, Methodology and methods of pedagogical research, Educational technologies, Multimedia presentation, Computer technology. These are all in the field of the announced competition for the occupation of the academic position associate professor.

Plagiarism was not detected in the candidate's research output submitted for review, and no inaccuracies or discrepancies were found in the interpretation of the empirical results obtained during the research activities.

The minimum national requirements for occupying the academic position of associate professor have been fulfilled, with the candidate providing additional evidence of her research activity and production.

3. Critical notes and recommendations

Based on the research output submitted for review, the following critical remarks and recommendations can be made:

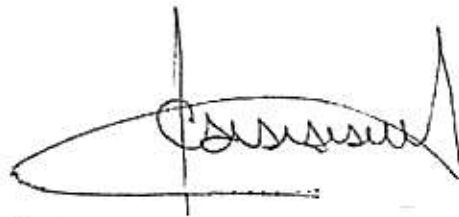
1. Monographic work and subsequent publications reflecting empirical research on the author will gain a great deal if the results of these are accompanied by detailed statistical processing, which is a reason for expanding the scope of their conclusions.

2. It is appropriate for the author's future research not only to be ascertainable, but to extend the research agenda towards opportunities for the development of digital competence, for example, which will be of great use for qualification and educational practices.

3. In the future, given the relevance of the issue explored by the applicant, ways should be found to increase its international recognition by enhancing publication activity in journals included in the Referencing and Indexing System, i.e. with Impact Factor (IF) in the Web of Science, Impact Rank (SJR) and SCOPUS online databases, with all scientific research and results finding their place in specialist journals publishing in the field of education sciences.

4. CONCLUSION

The analysis and evaluation of the research output submitted for review and compliance with the minimum national requirements for academic positions are grounds for highlighting the applicant's contributions to the competition. All this is a reason to propose to the members of the Scientific Jury and subsequently to the members of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Education of the "Konstantin Preslavski" University of Shumen, senior assistant professor **Natasha Lyubomirova Koleva** to occupy the academic position of associate professor in the professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Theory of upbringing and didactics - Educational technologies), area of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Tsankov', written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

Author:

assoc. prof. Nikolay Tsankov, PhD